

Organize Your Neighborhood!



A guide to building and maintaining
effective community organizations

Why Organize Your Neighborhood?

Neighborhood organizations help to build a sense of community and improve your overall quality of life. They bring neighbors together to socialize, discuss important community issues, resolve problems, and find out about current events occurring in the area. They also provide a forum where the community can meet with officials and other speakers about subjects of interest to the neighborhood.

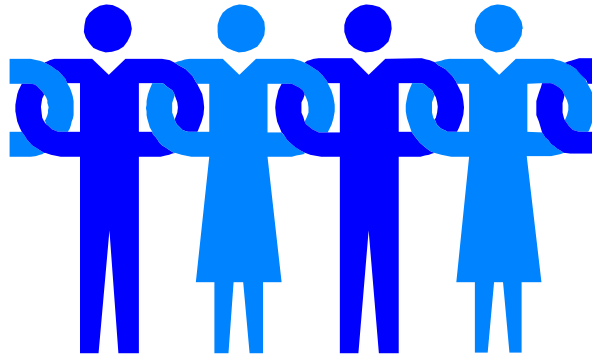
In addition, neighborhoods typically have a variety of problems that crop up from time to time, and it often takes community pressure to get them resolved. Forming a unified neighborhood group will help to address these issues.

There is strength in numbers.

When you join forces with your neighbors, much more can be accomplished than if you were to work alone to improve your area.

As an organized group, there will be

- More eyes on the street,
- More hands to do the work,
- More heads to think about solutions,
- More voices to be heard



Getting Started

There are a number of steps to getting off to a good start. You might already have some ideas about what you'd like to address, and perhaps you've spoken to some neighbors about it. That's a good start, but you should take a more comprehensive look at your neighborhood and get a broader picture of what others might perceive as their concerns or interests.



Steps to take:

- Define the boundaries of the area you want to organize. Walk down streets that you don't normally travel. Become more familiar with your neighborhood.
- Get to know residents and businesses owners on neighboring blocks. Stop and talk with people you see in their front yards, shops, and on the street.
- Seek out other neighborhood leaders: PTA members, church leaders, business operators. There may be others who are already trying to improve the area that you could join up with. Talk to these people about your interest in organizing and find out what their concerns are. Your Community Planner, City Councilmember's office, or the Community Relations division at the Police Department may know of other active residents in the area.

- Form a committee of interested people to discuss the common issues that you would like to address, and what the goals of the organization should be. This committee should work together to plan the first neighborhood meeting.

The First Neighborhood Meeting



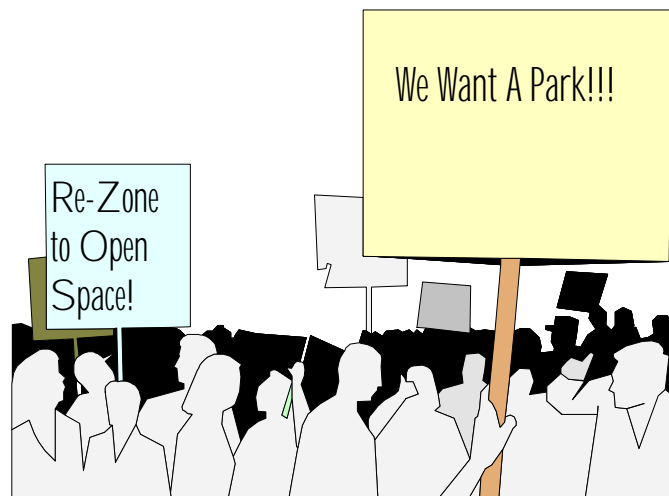
When planning the first meeting, the committee should consider the following:

- What you hope to accomplish by organizing
 - A strategy to attract people to the first meeting (schools, churches, neighborhood watch groups, door to door flyers, press release to local papers).
- How to present your ideas and goals to the audience. Decide on an agenda, meeting place, seating arrangement, who will speak, etc.
 - Reach out to all segments of the community. Bring members of all language and ethnic groups into the organization. Neighborhood concerns are sometimes cultural in nature, and having a multicultural organization will foster better communication, understanding, and education about cultural norms. Prepare multi-lingual flyers and provide translation services at meetings. Treat everyone equally regardless of age, gender, race, or class.

The first meeting should be well organized, strong, and motivational in purpose. Have a sign in sheet to use as a database for future communication. After discussing the benefits of organizing and the goals that the committee has begun to establish, you want people to be supportive and interested in helping out. Be open to new concerns that others raise at the meeting. Be a good listener, and solicit more volunteers to assist with developing the organization. Have an action plan to address issues that are brought up, and announce the next meeting date before adjourning.

Becoming an Effective Organization

It is important to keep the momentum going after the success of the first meeting. Immediately set to work on issues that were raised and plan for the next meeting. Continue to recruit new members for the next meeting. Use the information provided on the first meeting sign-up sheet to remind visitors of the next meeting and ask them to invite a neighbor. Find new places to advertise for the meeting and attract interest. Pick interesting meeting topics and bring in speakers that will draw a crowd and inform the community. If you've been able to address some issues that were raised at the first meeting, be sure to report your successes back to the group to demonstrate the effectiveness of the organization.



Attend meetings of older, more established organizations to see how they operate. The Council of Neighborhood Organizations (CONO) and Council of Business Organizations (COBO) are good forums to meet other activists like you and learn from their experience.

Establish a network of neighborhood contacts on each block to serve as the local representative and central contact person for the organization. That person can keep neighbors informed about the organization's activities, and continue to promote involvement in the group.

Maintaining Active Participation

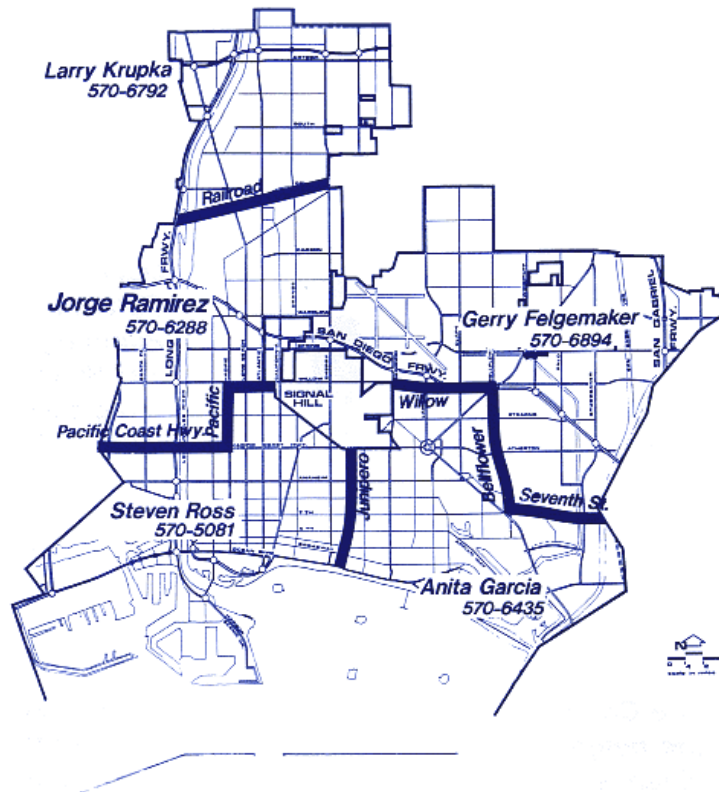


Keeping people involved in the organization once it is established can be difficult. In order to keep people interested and active in the group, keep the following principles in mind:

- Be clear about what the organization goals are. Stay focused on getting results and improving the neighborhood.
- Encourage all members to be active participants in the organization. Have a variety of tasks that can be delegated out to many volunteers, and don't forget to recognize them for their assistance!

- Always welcome new participants and include them in the participatory process. Make them feel welcome.
- Plan fun social events to keep people happy and excited about the organization.
- Run efficient meetings and keep them short and productive. Record brief action minutes to document what decisions were made. These are useful for later reference.
- Develop a mailing list, phone tree, or newsletter for effective communication.

Community Planners work with neighborhood organizations throughout the City and have lots of experience helping concerned citizens like you. They are a great resource which you should take advantage of. Call your Community Planner today!





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The Community Planning staff is devoted to serving the citizens of Long Beach and all of the neighborhood organizations that represent them. Our Mission Statement: To promote clean, safe, and livable neighborhoods, along with viable commercial areas, by encouraging and activating strong citizen participation and by articulating the interests of the community in both the development and implementation of planning policies.